

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Haris Kušmić interviewed **Jovan Divjak**

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Kušmić: Allow me to formally introduce myself. I am Haris Kušmić, currently working with the WFD [Westminster Foundation for Democracy]. I am interviewing Mr Jovan Divjak, whose biography I cannot possibly fit into a few opening sentences. Let me instead say something I have said before in conversation with him: that he is someone who has built and defended and given everything he had to this country in periods of both war and peace. Mr Divjak, thank you very much for inviting me here and giving me an opportunity to interview you. Unlike other interviews, the questions here may relate more to your personality. We are certainly going to touch on things that you have gone through, that the general public is familiar with, but the goal of this interview is to try and see Jovan Divjak as Jovan Divjak: you as a person, things you have gone through in your life, from childhood on—which may well be appropriate, as you are working on your book. We hope you will succeed in publishing it.

Divjak: And its title is “Do Not Shoot.”

Kušmić: And its title is “Do Not Shoot.” Exactly. Well, we can begin with your early life, when you were a child. Could you perhaps tell me something about your childhood?

Divjak: Well, my childhood is somewhat fresh in my memory as I often write and speak about it in interviews. I begin with the story of me bringing my parents joy on 11 March 1937. My father was a teacher, my mother a housewife. The teacher, Dule Dabić Hajdukis, is one of the main protagonists in *Magareće godine* [“The Tough Teens”], a novel by Branko Ćopić. And then a lot of travelling, because around the time I was born my father spent three or four days in a hospital in Belgrade. He was a teacher in Šuvajčić, a village close to Smederevo. From there he went to Bosanska Krajina. He was in Jablanica, the village of Jablanica, close to Bosanska Gradiška. That is where my sister was born, in 1940. But back then it was Romania—in 1942, 1944 he was a teacher in Romania, in a part of the Romanian Banat, the village of Langovet, Moldava. At that time he was with the partisans for a while. I still remember it vividly.

When I think of the war, I remember that I saw corpses on the Danube—these villages were along the Danube in Romania. I remember one particular evening in 1944, probably a winter evening. My sister and I were with my mother, she was making a cake. There

was a knock on the door. It was the military—we called them the Swabians—and my mother quickly threw some sheets on the table. They came in, inquired after my father, my mother said he was off to Timișoara to collect his salary. They started looking around, checking—he wasn't there. But they saw that on top of the cupboard there was a cake, a fruit cake that my mother had made. She offered them some cake, just to appease them. She sat down as soon as they left. "Ha!" [she said.] What for? My mother had made or sewn five-pointed stars on some caps. You can be sure that, had they seen this, the two of us would not be speaking now.

So, from there we went to Bela Crkva. Bela Crkva—nice boyhood, childhood with my sister, my father a teacher, my mother still a housewife. From there we went to Bosanska Krupa, 1947 to 1950. My father's origins go back to there, to Suvaja. It was there that I went to and finished primary school and enrolled in the secondary school. My mother was brave, she was brave. She would not let herself be hurt—she got a divorce. And from 1950 on, we lived in Zrenjanin.

There are also some nice stories related to Zrenjanin, typical of my youth. I tried various things there. This finger, which you can see is broken: I was the goalkeeper for Proleter. I'm bowlegged, footballs went right through my legs. I played marbles with my friends, never won. I went fishing, never caught a single fish. Nevertheless, I enjoyed myself, particularly at the movies. I remember two details related to this. My mother could not always afford to buy tickets for the movies, but I would still get in with fake tickets. I remember, it was quarter to six, I entered the Vojvodina movie theatre, there was a screening of *The Wages of Fear*, with Yves Montand I think. And I sat down in row sixteen—there were two seats there, otherwise it was full. Then I saw someone walking up behind me, I saw these were their seats. I switched seats three times and ended up in the front row, in front of the screen, where there was nobody. I wouldn't have minded being caught and kicked out; it was for my mother's sake. My mother managed to find a job in Zrenjanin very quickly, she was even the chair of the Workers' Council, she was a councillor in the Zrenjanin Assembly. This is one of these stories.

And one more thing, since I loved sports—loved watching them but, as I said, I was hardly into [playing them]. I jumped over the fences to watch the games. There was an international match, Proleter was in the first league at the time. I remember that Proleter had one match with Sarajevo, 1-1. I went to the entrance, I didn't have a ticket. Back then, just like today, they made accommodations for people with disabilities, and I pretended I was deaf and mute. They let me in—but at the next check point there was a neighbour of mine. How could I fool him? I somehow managed to get in. It was a nice period of my youth.

Yet another detail. Occasionally my mother wouldn't cook, and then I used to go to a hotel. As I was tall and very thin, the cooks would put a piece of meat at the bottom and

would cover it with stewed vegetables, and I would pay for the stewed vegetables only. There you have it. I remember that materially poor but spiritually rich period.

It was March 1956, my mother came to me and said, “You know, son, I have been told there is a military school in Belgrade that is free. You know I can’t put you through school.” I agreed to it, of course, but the only problem was how to pass the medical exam, as I was skinny and scrawny. First to Sarajevo, and then on to Belgrade. I was also fooling around in Belgrade. I watched Globetours, Tašmajdan constantly. Of course, the Academy, 1956 to 1959. I remained in Belgrade, being among the best students. I was in Tito’s guard. I was given the opportunity to report to him, to accompany him. We even attended the opening ceremony for the Iron Gate Hydroelectric Power Station. I loved being in his escort when he watched film screenings in the Pula Arena, I loved spending a month on the Brijuni islands, on Vanga. All this is vivid in my memory as something that very few people actually got to experience. And it has certainly motivated me, throughout my life, to take the right direction in life. Namely, I wanted to study psychology and pedagogy, but I was not able to. But I used my military education for it, since there were two parts to the army’s training at the Academy: the general part, general education, which was the same as in all secondary schools, and the specialist military part. I used it to try to get to know myself, to get to know people, particularly in Krajina in 1983. I believe one of my successes in life is that I got to know myself, got to know what is right and what is wrong. Not always, but I’m quite happy and satisfied.

Kušmić: You’ve touched on it, and I’m glad you gave me the overview from your youth to your relatively recent past, but I would like us to go a bit further back into the past: in addition to the influence of your mother and father, what about your grandmother and grandfather, your grandparents—what are your memories of them?

Divjak: Unfortunately, there are not any, as my mother lost her parents, or rather her mother, when she was only a baby. As far as I know, my grandfather, my mother’s father, was among the group of refugees from Russia after World War I. So, I have no memories of them, but I have some other, lovely memories. We had an aunt who, because she had two daughters, loved me very much. Her daughters were born in ’35 and ’33, while I was born in ’37. When we came to Zrenjanin from Bosanska Krupa, we stayed with my aunt and uncle. Certainly, as my uncle was rather strict and my aunt rather emotional, we learned a lot there, quite a lot. We stayed at their place for about one year, and later on my mother separated—or began living independently, I should say. But these connections, and those with music, classical music, were something that I learned from my cousins Biljana and Miljana, my aunt’s daughters. So, my introduction to some, how do you say, broader education came through listening to them and to concerts on the radio. They also played music a little bit. Thus, I was rather attached to my aunt and uncle. And to another aunt, who even named me—Velinka was her name. She gave me my

name. They lived in Zemun back then, so my childhood was marked by care and attention. I had yet another aunt, whom I visited as an academy cadet. She ran a pastry shop on her own, a nice one, in downtown Belgrade, across from the National Theatre. I visited her on religious holidays and before Christmas. Although, speaking of religion, yesterday we had a fantastic conversation with three or four [young people]. It's a group of young people: a Jew, a Catholic, a Muslim, and one of them is, how do you say, atheist, or what do you call it?

Kušmić: Agnostic?

Divjak: Agnostic. They have a project to visit twenty-five countries and talk to people, so they wanted to speak to me and my [scholarship students]. Whenever anyone asks, I tell them that I had to acquire religion, I had to acquire faith; maybe I would have, too, if it had been practiced in my home. Since it wasn't practiced, I didn't take to it. Of course, when it is acquired through education, it is far from what religion orders you to do. Religion determines behaviour. I believe we have free will to decide on our own, not someone above us. There is the link.

But to go back to my aunt, who invited me to visit her for Christmas, we used to spread hay and straw, then put walnuts inside. Then you search for them. These are all bits of memories that I still have. This keeps me going, this warmth towards something that was not an obligation but only love, or joy.

So I don't remember my mother's parents. I do remember an uncle, who I have a story about: I was around twelve and we went on foot from Bosanska Krupa. There was yet another religious holiday, I believe it was St Nicholas Day, it was our family holiday in December. We went to Suvaja. In the morning, there were around ten of us at the table, there were preparations for breakfast. They started with prayers. I started smiling—now, don't make me laugh. It was all, well, surprising to me. Although, it wasn't. It didn't make me disrespectful, though; I simply respected the things others liked. I remember that that's how I became respectful. So, to go back to our topic: nothing close related to my parents' parents; it was the environment that formed me. Music with my cousins, respect for religion from my aunt, respect for culture from my aunt and uncle, [respect] for education, upbringing; they gave me my upbringing.

Kušmić: When you came to Belgrade, your close relatives influenced you in terms of culture, religion, and education. During your studies, was there anyone, a teacher perhaps, who greatly influenced you?

Divjak: Well, to go back to the secondary school in Zrenjanin, certainly there were excellent teachers. For example, our headmaster, Lerik, Ivan Lerik—he was even a literary author, he did some writing. He was our French teacher. Boys usually skipped classes; I didn't. Girls were more in love with the Russian teacher. He was Russian, part

of the White Army; he left Russia and ended up in Zrenjanin as a teacher of Russian. I had no negative opinions of any of them. But I was almost undone by my Latin teacher. He could have given me a B but he didn't. He saw me sitting with a girl in a park. In the town centre. It was blasphemous at the time, incomprehensible. And he gave me a C. Then came the exam: a D in maths, chemistry, physics, but my essay was the best. I still keep the book in my library on Logavina Street. I won the main award, the award for the best piece of writing. The topic was: "Forge me, my life, do forge me! Forge me, my living, do forge me!" A line of verse by Oton Župančič. There was no way—one hour, three topics, choose one. I chose to write nothing. Then, all of a sudden, I changed my mind, wrote an essay in one hour and handed it in. That was the year when Nina Vinogradov joined us. She taught geography, twenty-four. She was beautiful, she was Russian. All women are beautiful, all women. We were in love with her.

And I gave it to her to read it. "Ach," she said, "This is no good. You are done for!" But my vision of life, which I still pursue, was that life is a 110-meter race with hurdles. Short, but, by God, full of hurdles. Another vision of myself: a philharmonic orchestra conductor. You raise one arm and hear the flute; then [you do it] again; then you behave yourself. And the third vision is a race, a marathon—how long is it, again?

Kušmić: I'm not sure.

Divjak: Aha! I'm just kidding, of course. 42.195 [kilometres]. Few people know this. And I know why .195 precisely. An English queen could not be bothered to walk so she stretched the route. Her royal box was here and she requested that it be 42.195. This is how I saw myself and my life. This is the marathon that I'm still running. There you have it.

Now, let me go back to the Academy. Extremely good, there was high quality there, and there my educational path began. I spent a lot of time in the library. That is where I met Vera, my wife. My wife, Vera, who was a librarian. I met her in 1958. I went there occasionally, to borrow a book, to return it. But academically speaking, I was good. I graduated with straight A's. But if they saw that you didn't know something, they gave you an F and withdrew your permission to leave the barracks. I got a few F's as well. And then I was not allowed to go and meet Vera downtown. But eventually I managed to turn those F's into A's.

The three of them were here in Sarajevo in the headquarters. In the headquarters of the Territorial Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of the army of Bosnia and Herzegovina throughout the war. Yes, I remember Lalić and two others. I have their names written down but, shamefully, I can't remember them now. It really gave me an opportunity to assert myself in contact with others. We had external visits, students and pupils. I don't know why, but I was there too. Perhaps because I was a democrat, maybe, I don't know.

I tried my hand at that, too. I played for my class's team, I was active, very active. I'm going to give you one detail. In 1958, we went to do field exercises. Džemil Šarac was our colonel at the time, an assistant. Every morning when we get up, we muster some courage to ask him. The European athletics championship was taking place in Zagreb at the time. And every morning: "Colonel, the results. What are the results, Sir?" I was part of these programs even. To put it simply, everybody had an opportunity to show their potential, both intellectual and physical, to a degree. But also, their social potential, as communication is vital. These communication skills are something that I still think of as a positive trait of mine, even today.

Kušmić: Did you interact with other cultures? As you said, they visited you frequently.

Divjak: Well, of course.

Kušmić: Were you aware of these other countries in Europe at the time?

Divjak: Well, I encountered Europe when I went there for school. In 1964 and 1965 I was at the military school in Paris [L'École d'état-major]. At this school you could see a German for the first time; he was your enemy not so long ago. You attend the same classes with him. Listen to this: out of fourteen of us in my group, thirteen were French. I was the only foreigner. But there were people from all over the world in such groups. So, at the command headquarters academy, there were people from America, Russia, from everywhere. However, some lectures we didn't attend. There were, like, military secrets; that information wasn't for us.

You could see a black person for the first time—I'm kidding now—and you scratch their cheek to see if there's any paint. Jazz for the first time, and you could also listen to, let me remember, Maria Callas. You could also watch football matches, you could watch games at the Parc des Princes, Austria versus France. The Austrians won 2-1. You could watch tennis—Roland Garros. Everything that had previously been distant, with all that that meant. Paris, Tour Eiffel. Boats. I travelled, I travelled. In my spare time. There were no lectures on Saturdays. On Sundays, I would board a train and go to Normandy to see everything for the first time: Mont Saint Michel, Lyon, and so on. So, I had enough opportunities to learn and get to know things I had not known before. This is how it went.

At that time there was another captain with me, a lieutenant. We were in a private hotel. When he returned to Belgrade, he bought himself a Fiat for 750,000 Dinars. Which meant that he had saved money, he'd saved it. On the other hand, he did not listen to Maria Callas. I didn't [save], I had to return part of the money I used for these other things. It was something that expanded my views, something different. It was funny to hear "Russian, Russian" when you passed through a Métro station, because I wore the Titovka cap with the five-pointed star. I used it all to expand my knowledge.

Kušmić: In the period when you worked, studied, learned, worked on yourself abroad, in

Paris and elsewhere, did you have some sort of European identity? Did you feel you belonged to something that was larger than you in terms of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc.? Did your relations with many different people—

Divjak: Well, OK, I can say I saw no difference. I saw no difference as it was physically the same. You know, at the time, in 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, we saw the TV for the first time. Elsewhere, everything was five or six steps ahead. So, in this regard, we were lagging behind. We were not lagging behind in terms of information. Just a short digression now. The first time I flew to New York, I was part of a delegation. We were leaving the airport, looking left and right—everything seemed familiar. The fat women, the guns, the police, everything. Because we had seen hundreds of movies and remembered things. The same goes for, let's say, Paris: you saw things you had already seen. You cannot be prepared in advance, but you became prepared by your learning. Your learning and your work. No, I didn't feel it. But, such an experience—you sit next to a German in class, who was your enemy not so long ago. Again, you see things you read about, you saw in paintings—other nations, religions. But there was no conflict there. We were interesting to one another because we moved from one part of socialism to a different system, but at the age of twenty-eight I did not feel any difference.

Kušmić: You spoke about the family, in general, so let us go back to it. Not only were you a child once but you also had children of your own with your late wife. I would like to know what is the key message, considering your age, your experience, the life you've led, that you and your wife conveyed to your children?

Divjak: Well, *la vita è bella*, life is beautiful. But we don't know what to do with it. You know, marriage is a serious matter and one should be ready for it. It's odd that I should say so because I was twenty-two and my wife twenty-one. So we didn't know anything about marriage. What was unfortunate for me and for my wife was that her father was killed in the war, her mother struggled to make a living, and she then lived with her aunt. One must prepare through one's personal experience. My experience was not quite positive with regard to my family, as my father was rather rough towards my mother. I don't remember him much. And so, with regard to my father, I don't have anything that would stand out as positive—or negative, for that matter. It was different with my mother; mothers' emotions are somehow a transmission of what it means in life. You know, the two of us started everything together.

Of course, to be honest, I didn't know what a woman was. I had not had a woman before [getting married]. I often joke that I didn't know a woman had three small holes. I didn't know a thing. When I was supposed to have intercourse for the first time at Kalemegdan in Belgrade, I didn't know what to do. And so forth. I mean, this is not only an intimate story, this is an experience that people should understand. And yet another thing, which I think is even worse: we don't know, you can't learn what raising children is. It is good to

give birth, but how do you raise children after that? Even when I speak of myself as a cadet, as a second lieutenant—I spent the first six months yelling at soldiers. I was looking for reasons to yell. Since we, as I said, guarded facilities, the presidential entourage, and Tito, when we started our seven-day shift, I was only looking for reasons to yell; I would find dust behind weapon holders and yell. And then one day, you come to your senses: you can't treat people like that. After six months, I came to my senses. The same goes for raising children, you come to your senses, though not at the beginning. Then you start playing chess with soldiers, you start talking to them, hugging them. Because I was not much older at twenty-three than someone who was doing his mandatory military service. At that time, there were those who were twenty-six or twenty-seven; they were older than me.

This other part, raising children, I'm not happy about it at all. I mean, I wasn't really, I was not a good father. I did play with my children, gave them many opportunities. I simply let their mother take care of them. They were little rascals. They got up to all sorts of mischief, and then their mother would want to report them to the police. I let her have her way, I let her. The three of us would go to Bentbaša, the two of them played football against me; we also raced one another during summer holidays, the fastest one was the winner. But they knew I was attached to my cadets, to their education. Because they were mere children of fifteen or sixteen years of age. They left their villages in the middle of nowhere, at the age of seventeen or eighteen. So they were raised in military schools. I would be there until 3 or 4 p.m., have lunch and go back, and in the evening, I would prepare my classes for the following day. It was constant work; I wanted to be better.

Eventually I realised, through my experience, that the children of successful parents—I may or may not be successful—are not successful. I simply realised there was a certain resentment towards hard work and duties. You just work the whole time, work the whole time, not thinking about anything else. I was stupid, too. By God, I was stupid, too. Before the age of fourteen there was a moment, a moment, its consequences may still be present. The two of them were constantly provoking each other. Vlado was two years younger, he was always screaming about something. When I went to settle it, [he said,] "My brother provoked me!" I was rather rough with his brother. And then I said, *Never again*. Never ever, but it probably still has its consequences.

So, when one enters into marriage, when one starts a family and has no experience whatsoever, in such situations we emulate our parents. Nowadays, I talk about marriage, I try to educate these young people. I'm not dressing it up, I'm not dressing marriage up. I'm not dressing up raising children, believing that I can somehow get through to young people, or even middle-aged ones.

Yesterday, I had a small debate with Mersiha, who works with me. A small debate. I said, "I do what I think one should do, but I don't impose anything." Because this is a fantastic message for children: we learned from him; he did not make us, it was all us. Therefore, I do not impose but want them to follow me. I want them to understand what is important, rather than me telling them, "Do such-and-such a thing." It is up to them in their young age. Thus, the part about the family and life is something that, as I see it, was not properly done, but I spent fifty-seven pleasant years of marriage with my wife. It would have been different though if we had both been mature when we married and started raising our children.

Kušmić: You spoke about raising children, not only your children with your wife, but also of the upbringing you received at the Academy when you were twenty-three. I would like to know who was in charge of your upbringing at the Academy—perhaps your first superior? Who impressed you the most or, perhaps, in the most negative way? And, if there was such a person, who influenced you in the most positive way?

Divjak: Well, I had superiors, officers who fought in the war, World War II, i.e., anti-fascists—their tolerance, understanding, simply their experience. They were people in their thirties or forties with considerable life experience. I mentioned Lalić. I'll find the other names one of these days and tell you—I have them written down somewhere. There is no single special person because we had some twenty courses, each taught by a different teacher. I have no negative opinions, since I understood that their requests were justified. I have already mentioned the rule that if you got an F in maths or shooting, as I did, you were not allowed to go downtown. That in particular motivated me, if nothing else [because I wanted] to go out with my Vera. I wanted and needed to be positive. There is one, Kićo was his name. He taught us sports, a sports teacher who organised rallies. We participated in them twice, on the occasion of Tito's birthday, at JNA Stadium. I said there were a few professors. I have nothing particularly negative, nothing relevant, really—well, except General Šarac. For when I came to Sarajevo he was here as well and we continued our friendship.

Kušmić: Now, an interesting question in terms of unusual things. What did you buy with your first paycheck? Do you remember?

Divjak: Oh, I received my first paycheck in August or September [1959], when I graduated from the Academy. I worked at the sugar factory in Zrenjanin, a factory that manufactured sugar and medicines. I bought a wristwatch for my mother and for my sister from my first paycheck; Neva was the brand. There you have it. And I also used the money to buy my wife's wedding dress. I got married in my uniform since I had no suit. I had ordered one but it wasn't ready. We got married on 3 January 1960, three months after I graduated from the Academy.

Kušmić: When you look back at your entire life before the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or perhaps during and after it, what period or moment were you most proud of in terms of a decision you made?

Divjak: Let me first say this: as I said before, it was materially poor but spiritually rich. I could not afford books—not me, but rather my mother—but went to the library in Zrenjanin every other day to read the daily newspapers, various literature and, certainly, books. Books, theatre, that’s what I was interested in. I have already said that. But I do remember from that period that there was a book, *300 Wonders*, printed in Zagreb by someone. I remember, at my age of eighty-three, that there was a woman who graduated from university at the age of seventy-five. That’s [what I would have liked]—to graduate from university. Although my qualifications are at the university level.

Well, it wasn’t a special decision, it was my duty, a professional one. Yes, when I was offered, on 8 April [1992], the post of Deputy Commander of the Territorial Defence of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina . . . Journalists have asked me regularly, “How did you decide to accept?” It was my professional decision and my duty to be on the side of those who were in jeopardy, regardless of their origin. If you learn that the first person killed here in Sarajevo was on Trebević on 1 March, if you read in the newspapers that a boy was killed in April at Kobilja Glava, if in the meantime you learn that Olga and Suada were killed, then you ask yourself, “What are you doing? It is your duty to play a part in stopping it.” Thus what for many of those around me, for journalists, for the media, was a decision—“Now, there’s a decision”—for me it was a duty, not a decision but a duty. I draw the line there, a decision and a professional obligation.

Kušmić: Did you think that in the period when you didn’t make the decision but rather assumed the obligation, do you think it was a professional turning point, a turning point in life, as we might call it?

Divjak: Both, a professional turning point and a turning point in life, of course.

Kušmić: Was it the most important period in your life?

Divjak: It was the most important; there are many other things but it was the most important one. The decision to marry, that was also important. It’s important to defend, but, you know, I was tried in October or November 1991 for allowing, as the commander of the Mostar/Sarajevo District Territorial Defence, for a number of weapons and military equipment to be given to the police in Kiseljak. This Territorial Defence was under the command of the Sarajevo district, where I was the commander, so I defended myself. I was sentenced to nine months, two years on probation. Also, I was there in Parsovići, where my family is from. These are all small decisions, in the sense of to give up or not to give up. A crisis, not a crisis. And then the situation in Vienna [Divjak was arrested in

Vienna in March 2011 at the behest of the Serbian government. In July of that year the Austrian court rejected Serbia's extradition request and Divjak was released]. In Vienna, listen to this, I spent three days in prison with criminals. Fuck, you get there at night, they put you in with six others. In the morning, they call you but not the black guy. You spend five days with two guys who swallowed drugs—they saw it on the x-ray. But despite all that, this was definitely an important decision. An important one. Generally. But it comes back to you. It comes back to you in a positive way. When I find some time to take a walk downtown, every second or third person stops me to make a selfie with me. We want selfies. People give it back to you. I receive no recognition on the part of the state; there is no state. So, I receive no recognition, not from the army. When I retired, seven of us, the army gave us guns. Why a gun?

Kušmić: Did you receive any kind of award?

Divjak: Award? What award? Nothing at all, nothing from the army. Or from this [person]. It doesn't matter, it's even better that I didn't. But these encounters in the street. That decision means a lot to the people, they take it as the pinnacle. But when I look at it now, it took courage, I think. And it was a matter of will, to go back to my daily life. I buy something for lunch, cook something. There is a plate or two or three to wash, and a mug. At ten or eleven I go to sleep. Am I going to wash up or not? I certainly am. That's what it means. I want this, I'm going to do this. You see, we are complex individuals both physically and intellectually. Every day—last night, for example, when we said I would come. Then I have a thought—it's mine, but one copies many things. The thought is that I now know less than ever, I now know less than I used to know. I know more than I ever knew, but less means a lot of things, doesn't it? But I know more, I visited the CERN [European Organisation for Nuclear Research]. Who from Bosnia and Herzegovina has ever visited the CERN? There you have it. That's where I was. Now, before you came, I was here reading, reading some impossible things. They made a man there—they did, not the Japanese or the Chinese. They made a man. So every day you know more than yesterday. That's how it works in life too.

And the matter of will, let's go back to that. That decision was my obligation. I was honoured to be offered that. The thing that was offered was somewhat ulterior in motive, but I didn't care. "We need a Serb." Because they treat me as a Serb, whereas I'm a Bosnian and Herzegovinian. Speaking of my ethnicity, we know it in theory and in practice, and in every country's constitution, until a person is sixteen or eighteen, it is the parents who decide on such matters, isn't that so? The parents decide on the child's ethnicity. Later on, the child can decide on their own. Up until the 1970s I declared myself a Serb, from the 1970s onwards a Yugoslav, and since that 8th of April I say Bosnian and Herzegovinian. You know that there is no such category on forms, only "Other." That means that you are now speaking with an "Other," with "Others" in Bosnia and

Herzegovina, as I declare myself a Bosnian and Herzegovinian. That's my decision, I declare myself a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina for what is my professional duty.

Kušmić: Your professional life did not end with the war. Later on you were active; you tried, as I said at the beginning, to build our society, not only during the conflict but also in peacetime. We may touch on it later but, if I may say so, you have spoken a lot about higher powers, the influence of politics. I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, but it can be said that, at that time, politics was quite present in your life. Starting with the idea that a Serb should from the start be prominent in the defence [of Bosnia and Herzegovina], and continuing with some other things.

Divjak: With the fact that Alija [Izetbegović] offered me retirement in 1994.

Kušmić: Yes, yes, with all of those things. When you look at politicians, past and present, are there any you admire? And why do you admire them?

Divjak: Well, first of all, I don't admire myself; how can I admire others?

Listen, I was given an opportunity. To teach young people how to defend themselves. People didn't know how to dig a shelter. To teach them that it is not supposed to be on the right-hand side but on the left-hand side. People are used to it being on the left-hand side, literally; it should be on the right-hand side—and so on. So, I taught them, those soldiers. I go to see them, it's raining, up there at Čolina Kapa, they stand aghast. I spend two-thirds of the war with soldiers, on the frontlines. Yesterday I talked with one of them, we met—do you know where the leatherworks are, right by Energoinvest? In between, in Ilidža?

Kušmić: Yes, I know.

Divjak: And I find Edo, or Ademović Kemo. He says, "What are you doing here, Colonel? What are you doing here?" So, I went among the soldiers. I visited the infirmary, I visited the hospital. People remember it now. Yesterday, a woman told me, "It is you who helped me," and I don't know what I did. "My child was able to leave thanks to you." It's this part, this part—as I say, psychology. That's my greatest source of personal satisfaction: that, when the situation was most difficult, I was with civilians and soldiers. You see, you come at night, radio, radio, they complain, an attack at Dobrinja, What do we do? They're screaming. I send them a radio message: "Do what you saw in movies about Rome. Boil water, or pour oil on those attacking you." I communicated with citizens by means of the radio. Always, whenever there was something. Imagine going to the bakery at 1:30 in the morning. If the Klas bakery was attacked, they can see you, and you give them a loaf of bread—go ahead, eat it. This part, it was what I built, I raised this communication to the highest level. You see, you go to see plays performed just so that the actors and the citizens will see you. Whenever someone asks, "Were you afraid?"—I was not afraid in the war. I am afraid

now. But I'm afraid of what I did. You know, I was running across Titova Street under sniper fire. Running across the street. I was not running but walking at a normal pace. They are looking at me saying, "If the colonel can, so can we." At Dobrinja, or rather at the airport settlement, I did a somersault a hundred metres in front of the Serb army's lines. Partly as a way of mocking them and partly as a way of sending a message through the media. It was always motivating for civilians. Of course, it's a certain type of courage, it doesn't hurt that I did that—except for the showing off part. Showing off in front of the journalists. But let's get back to the question, can you repeat it, please?

Kušmić: Politicians, who—

Divjak: No, that doesn't interest me. Mind you, I was close, and still am today, with some—but not politicians. There was this one—disgusting. Disgusting. Can you imagine, he was a member of the Presidency! One time we, the delegation of the Serbian Civic Council—I'm not a Serb—we were talking to Alija Izetbegović about the problem of Serbs being in danger. He—that member of the Presidency—said, "There is no such thing in the government, nor in the army." And then Alija asked him, "OK, do you have any data on how many Serbs there are?" This member of the Presidency said, "Well, I don't have any data with me now, but I'll make a note and let you know next time." He doesn't have it now, he'll get it next time, but he still raises that issue. And then Alija said, "Well, as far as I know from the media, Serbs make up about twenty-four percent." He knows that Serbs make up twenty-four percent. As I wrote in my book that I mentioned earlier, Alija said to me, "Thank you for doing me the honour."

In December 1993 there was this meeting of political assistants. [One of them] was saying that we all needed to behave like Tito's partisans. You know, he said, "We should behave like Tito's partisans." But it was just words. Nobody believed in it. This person didn't believe in it either. He said at the time—I think it was more of a message to those who did believe in it—"It is difficult today to be a Serb or a Croat in Sarajevo, because as far as our own people are concerned, we are traitors, and nobody trusts us here either." He supports it! He himself says there is no confidence. Instead of saying, "We must!" Well, that's my story about politics and what it's like. As for the people from academic circles, we [at Education Builds Bosnia and Herzegovina] recently celebrated our twenty-five year anniversary. No one congratulated us. No one! And from political circles? No one. After all that we have done, was it not polite for the *Reis* [Husein Kavazović, Grand Mufti (*Reis Ul-Ulema*) of Bosnia and Herzegovina] to call us, for Puljić¹ [Vinko Puljić, archbishop of Vrhbosna] to say, "You are doing a great job. You work with children, for children. For Bosnia. For Europe. For the world"? Nobody did that. I keep it somewhere in the back of my mind. But it shows who they are and what they are. [The previous Reis] also showed

what he was. Both of them, [the current and previous one]. They have contributed to the religious strife. The first one, the second one, and the third one. They are not able to help that old lady Fata [¹ Fata Orlović, a Bosniak woman displaced during the war. She is currently involved in a legal dispute with Republika Srpska, seeking the removal of a Serbian Orthodox church built on her property] get her land back, who is—how old now? Sixty-seven, sixty-eight, sixty-nine, seventy? They are not able to get her land back. So, who are they? And what can one think of them?

I have a positive opinion of [Bogić] Bogičević. However, he represents a missed opportunity for Bosnia and Herzegovina, because when there were talks—also about the UN organisation—well, I don't know. He refused many things. And one of his interpretations was, oh well, his mother and brother are in Ugljevik. Well, if they're in Ugljevik, then bring them here if that's the problem. But this man has no balls. Water dripping day by day wears the hardest rock away. Whatever he said or didn't say. It was never confirmed what exactly he said. It remained unclear. There is a recording. But it's not just him, there are others, too. Speak! Three persons have already said it. And it would still be the same, whether he said yes or no. Because it's not something he prepared in two hours. So, I do not have, I cannot think of anyone who would be a good example among politicians. They were all changing their minds, one moment one thing, the next moment something different. Because this is all very immature. Komšić—he is, in my opinion, immature. And they say he is a Croat. He is such a hypocrite. So, when you ask for some kind of role model, some kind of leader . . . There are ordinary people. There was one who was beautiful, but he's gone. He was the first among the rest, the little Serb. He's nowhere to be found. Gone.

Kušmić: A member of the Presidency?

Divjak: No, no. He was an activist. Very, very active. He is gone. It is what it is. The other day we were in Mostar. And now let's go back to this man who claimed that Alija took care of the makeup of the nation. How did he take care of it when no brigade commander was a Serb or Croat? So, they abolished the Croatian Defence Council here in Sarajevo, because it was a threat—they might escape. They were here on the front line. The museum, the Suada and Olga Bridge [In April 1992, Suada Dilberovic and Olga Sucic were killed at the former Vrbanja Bridge from the shots from a nearby hill. The bridge was later renamed], and in the rear there was one unit, so they wouldn't escape. I said it once. Yes, I wrote it in that book of mine. For me, Alija Izetbegović was a man of morals. In my opinion. But let history evaluate what kind of politician, diplomat, and soldier he was. Someone else should evaluate that; I've made my own assessment. Because he knew, with his son, how to break the blockade of Sarajevo in September '94, with an attack on Grdonj. On Špicasta Stijena.

Well, these are things that . . . So I'm talking about my own experience, not, as someone said . . . Because [Izetbegović] didn't stop Caco [Mušan Topalović] until someone threatened him from the outside. It was torture, not only for Serbs and Croats, but also for Bosnians who refused to obey. Why did he need those *Ćelos* [*Ćelo*, literally "bald person," can refer to a person serving in a militia in defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war as well as to someone involved in criminal activity afterward; it was also the nickname of Ismet Bajramović, a prominent soldier and organised crime figure]? Like that *Ćelo* from Zenica who raped a thirteen-year-old girl and was later sentenced to prison. He brought him here to be a commander. In Stari Grad all the commanders were criminals that whole year. Caco with his three thousand, thirty-five hundred people—torture. And then he said, "I didn't know." Well, I wrote him a letter of resignation on 9 May and said, "Send me to the frontline. If something happens to me, you can be sure that I didn't run away." It's a story that doesn't have to be here at all. It doesn't matter. That didn't discourage me. I came out of every crisis even stronger.

And then I went back to education. My whole life, after the Academy, I raised and educated children. For eighteen years. NCO school. They come when they are thirteen, fourteen years old. And then military academies, when they are twenty, twenty-two. And then the officers—it was all about education. But in '94 nobody would hire me. Nobody, nowhere. And then this Frenchman came, Bernard-Henri Lévy, and said, "There is Divjak, let Divjak teach you." I took Lévy up to Grdonj. And Lévy wrote that I was a Serb, whose father was a Muslim. But Lévy didn't understand at all, or he didn't want to understand. It's nationalism. I've said it countless times. When Alija died, [Lévy] wrote in his own newspaper that he was at Alija's funeral. [He wrote that] Divjak was there as well. Orthodox. He is a *juif* [French: Jew]. But they weren't there, neither was I. We were in the Malraux centre, watching it on television. And he wrote that all three of us were there. He wanted to say, Well, there are three nations grieving for Alija. I do not accept these people. He is great, but he didn't understand, he didn't understand the problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Let's go back—there is no one in particular that I could say I follow.

Kušmić: Then we shouldn't go deeper into politics. Thank you for touching on a wide range of topics, for deepening my understanding and the understanding of people who will listen to this one day. Now I would like to focus a little more on your current activities [with Education Builds Bosnia and Herzegovina]. You said that, in a way, education has always been an integral part of your life, and that you were involved in it in your twenties as well as now, in your eighties. And you mentioned the notes that children used to leave for you, about what you had accomplished. Being around for more than twenty-five years is not a small thing for any association, especially one that covers the whole country with its scholarships. I believe that for you it may have been a natural sequence of things that led you to this, but what was the decisive moment that made you start getting involved?

Divjak: A logical question. Quite simply, as I said before, I wasn't very active in '94. I recall, it was April. A duty officer called me. I remember the details, I was at the barber shop. He said, "Alija is looking for you." I went [to see him]. And then, classic, [Alija] said, "Well, I was thinking about you, you know, about retirement." I felt the tears welling up inside me and thought, "Fuck retirement!" I was thinking, well, if not retirement, how about the post of military attaché in Paris. Or something in the military here, so I could stay here. Then I just said, "Who mentioned retirement?" And, of course, on my way out, I dropped by to see the members of the Presidency, Duraković, Kljuić, Pejanović, this Tatjana Mijatović. No way—they eventually raised objections and prevented my retirement.

After that I was—there were delegations coming from Malaysia, Pakistan, and elsewhere. I've never even been at the table, let alone participated in negotiations. But when someone from the West comes—here he is! Always the same story. I have never been compelled to say anything. But I represented the fact that it was mixed. That there were also Serbs and Croats and Bosniaks and others.

I'll make a small digression. During a visit to Mojmiilo in '92, I met a good commander, a Roma. He said, "Colonel, Sir, what are these Chetniks doing to us? What's happening?" He said, "We are being shot with anti-aircraft guns. We are not aircraft! We are Roma." We were born to do something useful. A person who doesn't know anything shouldn't have been born. I wondered: "What? What to do?" And then it was simply a matter of self-reflection, of reflecting on what happened after World War II. I was living in Zrenjanin, as I told you. Bela Crkva, Zrenjanin. And all those villages around Zrenjanin were settled by people from these areas, mostly from Bosnia, Sutjeska, Krajisnik, Lazarevo, where Mladic was captured. These were my classmates, twenty-seven of us, twenty boys and seven girls. Poor people know how hard it is to get an education. And then, a simple story: that it would be the same after this war. I offered it to the people around me. There were fifty-six of us. And there is one fantastic detail here. We were preparing everything, the papers. It was the first foundation. We looked at the new law on organisations, the foundation was called "Education Builds Bosnia." All the documents were prepared for the Assembly, I spoke before the Assembly—here is a picture from the session, you see who was there? Do you notice?

Kušmić: I see, I see.

Divjak: There they are. There were two directors, a lawyer—who died the other day—one professor. There you go. And then Lagumdžija's mother, Raza, called out, "But where is Herzegovina, Mr General?" We had to change everything. Everything, including the seal. Everything, everything, everything. Herzegovina. So that was the motive, simply, the vision that it would be the same after this war as well. So, what else but to try? So, I

tried. It's an attempt . . . you can't . . . you don't have the funds. You're not a favourite of the authorities, such that they would provide scholarships through you. It used to be that way: at one time the city authorities were providing scholarships through us, eighty kids, but not anymore. I even teased Mayor Skaka a bit about it. He said, "I see I haven't helped much. I'll help you." And he never called. But we succeeded, we succeeded. What you see here—it is ours. Our property. Paid the loan. Only three employees. The two girls were our scholarship recipients, and Edo—my faithful companion and the founder of the association.

Mind you, every year our budget is between 1 and 1.2 million, it goes through the association. A total of 7,052 students have been awarded a scholarship, that's around 3 million Euros. It's not about the money anymore, they are finding something here that they cannot find at home or at school. Mind you, they have been in eighteen European countries, in Canada, in Uruguay. And, as you said, they are from all over Bosnia. Fewer, of course, from Republika Srpska. We had one project three years ago, and the president of that association over there said, "Fine, but only if Divjak does not sign." So we didn't sign. But then, we have a large number of Roma children from Republika Srpska. In the last couple of years, when we went to Boračko Lake, some kids came to us from Republika Srpska, together with Bosniaks.

Generally speaking, it's a lot, and yet it's not a lot. It would be much more if we were leaning on one of the political parties. We strive to be completely [independent]. They visit us here. Konaković was here. The other day Jusko said, "You're great." He turns us down sometimes. We asked for three thousand, we needed it for the summer.

So yes, satisfied. Satisfied because we are godparents to many. We are invited to their exams, they get 9's, 10's. There was this little one, Dalila, a Roma girl from Kakanj. It is a pleasure to have successful ones. I don't know, you may have heard of that president of the Association of Widows of Shahids and Fallen Fighters at the federation level, Skrilj Almin. There are lot of them who are doctors, lawyers, and so on. There are a large number of them, but only a small number of them ever show up later to offer some support, to help others. When receiving a scholarship, each one of them has to sell fifty calendars, fifty calendars to help themselves, or to show solidarity with those who don't have a scholarship. But they won't do that either. You see, three years ago we started a raspberry farm. Twenty of them should have come for planting; five of them turned up. These days raspberries are being picked close to that place, what is it called? Malešici. Again, twenty of them said they would come, five turned up to pick the berries. So, we try to inspire these young people not only to receive, but to earn a little.

Kušmić: What is the highest praise you've received for the things you've done?

Divjak: Well, praise is when people stop me on the street. Give me a hug. Take selfies. It was funny, the other day, on Sunday—or was it Saturday? [A man approached me and said,] “General, we are from Canada, we would like to come meet you.” “Excuse me? Canada?!” A man, a woman, two young girls, twelve, thirteen years old. The man started tearing up, the woman too. There it is—that’s the praise. Everywhere. The other day I was in Kladanj—sorry, Kakanj. They had a long race, two-and-a-half kilometres long, so they invited me to hand out some awards. And I was welcomed—do you know what a pleasure it is when people greet you warmly, welcome you, or when someone stops you on the street after twenty-seven years? These are my rewards.

Kušmić: I remember when we first met, at Druga Gimnazija. I couldn’t get to you at the beginning, that’s how many young people came before me to take a picture with you, to congratulate you or just to say hello.

Divjak: That’s a thank you. That’s it. It means as much as a Legion of Honour. There are only a few [to have received the Legion of Honour] in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was recognised by the city of Barcelona. And all that is behind me now. But having the people’s recognition is its own reward.

Kušmić: Let’s change course a little bit here, away from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and go to the European segment. To add that to your life story, too. In your opinion, is Europe more a political or cultural project? Economic, scientific?

Divjak: The idea of Europe is something that I understand a little differently. Europe is divided. Totally divided. There are twenty-nine or twenty—how many member states in the EU? But where are the others? Who runs Europe? Its economy? Its culture? Who manages it? Three, four states. So, there is no stable system in Europe that allows for the development of each country’s democracy in its own way. It imposes. Europe imposes relations upon those who are not EU members. Well, such a Europe is simply a political-military force. Military, because—why is Europe getting involved in Syrian wars? Why? Why does Europe need Afghanistan? Why is Europe dealing with that? Europe is not the world’s police. [It is] because Europe depends on America.

When I talk to the French, asking them why they support America so much, they say, “America saved us in the First and Second World Wars.” Well, you know, about three months ago, when there was that ceremony, Macron was trying to say something, but then Trump responded, “So what do you want? We saved you!” And now Europe is trembling: “Will America leave NATO or not?” Why does Europe need NATO? Why couldn’t it be a centre of culture, tolerance, and peace?

And now pay attention to this. I’d claim that the two of them, Putin and Trump, talk about peace every day. And they are also pressing the war button every day. Threats are made on a daily basis. They keep the world in fear. First their own people, and then everyone

else. One cannot hear five positive European or global statements in one day. It's always some combination of both. If they don't do this or that, this or that will happen.

That's how I see Europe. It sets the rules. Europe has decided to accept Romania and Bulgaria because they have borders with Russia, even though they haven't achieved much. And every five to six years they change the criteria, go looking for different ones. When I talk about Europe, I would rather talk more about individual countries. You know very well that Europe condemns Germany for being the first state to recognise Slovenia and Croatia. And it claims that if they hadn't done so, Milošević would not have gone to war. And what about Europe? Why didn't Europe stop the war in Croatia? Why didn't it thwart Milošević between 1989 and the nineties, or when he enacted the new constitution in 1989, abolishing the rights of Albanians and Vojvodinans? Why didn't Europe react then? That's where the problems are, these are the roots of all the evil that is happening at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They mutually disagree.

Kušmić: And it continues to this day.

Divjak: Well, of course. It's even worse today. And now we are witnessing this armament. Every day you can see—some are getting [weapons] from the Russians, Croats are getting them from the Americans. Now our [politicians] are boasting that they have ammunition. The other day we earned money on ammunition. And then they talk about peace. They talk about tolerance. Forget the ammunition. Because neither Serbs, nor Croats, nor Bosnians can have more planes or more helicopters than what was agreed, whether in Vienna or, I don't know, Casablanca. So, we can't have more than three hundred tanks. Because it's being monitored, and that's not something that is without interest. It's being monitored. All of them signed [the agreement]; we signed it as well. Today, when it comes to certain kinds of weapons, we have even more than Serbia. Certain kinds of weapons. But by no means, as it is constantly claimed here, enough that we could stop the fourth largest army in Europe. Fourth largest? That's also what I deal with in the book. I present information that shows that, at that time, [the Yugoslav People's Army] was the ninth, the tenth largest army in Europe. And it was all messed up. At that time, the JNA [Yugoslav People's Army] was torn apart because it no longer had reservists and non-reservists, soldiers from Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was a mess, which raises the question: why didn't it defend itself? What to defend against? What have Bosniaks defended? They have 24 percent of the territory. Why don't they say so? Why don't they say, "Here, we have 24 percent." But they are satisfied with 24 percent. Because out of 51 percent, 24 percent is territory belonging to Bosniaks, 27 percent is territory belonging to Croats. Territorial. Bosniaks are satisfied to run Tuzla, Sarajevo, Bihac, half of Mostar—and as for the rest of it, they don't care. That's what—but then, religion has a big influence here, a very big influence.

Kušmić: When it comes to religion, do you have any examples—I myself could now list all of them—of religion being used in a negative way? When you reflect on your life—do you see religion being used more and more in the social sphere?

Divjak: Well, I will tell you what I know about it. For example, one female employee of the Association [of Citizens, an NGO], a Croat—her father was a Croat, her mother was a Serb—went, in 1992, in the worst of times, in winter, to the church in Marijin Dvor to ask for food. And the person who received her asked, “Well, you have children, have they been baptised?” She said, “No, they haven’t.” He told her, “Don’t come back.” So, she had to baptise her children to get food. That’s one of the examples. There were many. And with Bosniaks as well. Blackmail. They were blackmailing people. Imagine now if you were in that multinational army, in the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. You know when the first problem arose, in 1990, when that singer Ajanović asked for a *masjid* [mosque] to be opened. I don’t know if you know about that. That’s when it started. And, of course, after all that, all three sides were OK. Well, as far as I know—maybe I’ve misunderstood—but there is no fasting during war. A sick person doesn’t have to fast. He organised fasting in the middle of the war. You keep a soldier up on the frontline—hungry. You bring him down to eat and then you send him back again. So that part, it penetrated completely, religion penetrated deep into the pores. These days—I don’t know exactly how much it bothers you—he is organising the commemoration ceremony for the defence of Sarajevo, of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in August 1993. The army ran away—ran away! And he put a mosque on the poster. What is the message in that? That’s the answer to this, nothing else. The mosque on the poster is what’s important to him. Instead of trying to find some kind of symbol, a hand, a heart, something. I would put a half-soldier, half-civilian figure. But no. That’s what he marks as a victory. Belief in Allah.

Kušmić: Can you somehow make the parallel between the use of religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Europe, especially nowadays? Does religion connect people or further separate them?

Divjak: Well, according to analyses in Europe, there are many more people today who choose religion over nationality. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to the 2013 census, 77 percent of the population classified themselves by religion, 74 percent [also] by nationality. Religion is getting more dominant in Europe. You follow that, you know more about it than I do. Religion is more present than nationality. There is a pope with his own [story], the Reis has his own [story], this person has his own [story]—I don’t know. Each one of them has his own story to protect his religion from that of the other. Animosity is being created towards others, especially towards Bosniak Muslims. This is a political as well as a religious issue, Europe’s attitude towards Muslims. Because both Belgrade and Kolinda today follow Milošević’s and Tudjman’s politics, starting from their “purpose in the Balkans to prevent Islam from penetrating into Europe.” Kolinda [Grabar-Kitarović]

says it's ten thousand. Why hasn't she ever offered any proof? Or provided any figures showing there are *mujahideen*? Well, we know the controversy she caused, what she said about Israel. Because they think the same as Serbs. The Serbs claim—we have a letter from [Vuk] Drašković from 1993 about Jerusalem in which he wrote, “We are the second greatest casualties of World War II, after the Jews.” He flirts with the Jews about being victims. So does Kolinda, the same. She goes there. You know when there was that sports event in Osijek? When Thompson sang, she came, and the ambassador from Israel. And stuff like that. So, whatever is happening in Europe, as far as religion is concerned, reflects on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Religion dominates Europe as well. One part of it, not the whole of Europe. Not the whole. But new religions are also being created, contra-religions. I don't know—the ones that haven't been successful so far. This is made possible because they have big money. They have a lot of money. You follow that, you know. Imagine, they charge 4,000 BAM for a cemetery plot. They charge 1,500 for a funeral. And, as I said earlier, I've learned and I've read that all religions require humility. There is even one interpretation of Islam as meaning humility, penance.

Kušmić: In your opinion, is religion abused a lot? Misinterpreted?

Divjak: Yes, but bear in mind that it is very connected to the ruling party. It leans on it. Imagine, [this person] gave a *khutbah* [sermon] on Igman²! For the soldiers, or for those former soldiers who are no longer in Allah's way. Right? *Allahu Akbar*. God is great. Right? But God is not the greatest when it comes to defence of the state. Because there isn't just one religion in this country, there isn't one nation. This is what they call a fake secular state.

Kušmić: Since Bosnia and Herzegovina is made up of multiple nationalities, multiple religions, some are in the majority, some are in the minority, can we somehow survive as a collective? Are we strong and mutually close now?

Divjak: No, no, no. The only collective is national, it is strong. Entities in Krajina, entities in I don't know. Đurevska wrote it twenty years ago, and you copied a little bit that writer of ours—

Kušmić: You mean Nada Đurevska?

Divjak: Yes. And that writer from Croatia, who wrote *The Glembays*, we all recall, he wrote that we live in cattle pens. It stinks in our pen, but we feel great. That's the situation of the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And one more piece of information: Before 2013 there was a small, fairly strong movement aimed at achieving the goal of having more people declare themselves Bosnian and Herzegovinian. In favour of the civic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Well, there was the possibility that if there were 14 percent of

them then the constitution could be changed, and then we could . . . There were lots of things foreseen. How many people declared? 4.3 percent. And there were no more talks about that, it wasn't worth it. Because there is no movement for a secular, democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina. None! Only for the divided one, like now.

Kušmić: Can it survive like that?

Divjak: Well, it survives. It survives. And other states survive. Because, ultimately, it is in Bosniaks' best interest for it to survive. Serbs would easily—they do not give up on joining Belgrade. Zagreb does not give up on forming a republic, does it? Because it established its own? We just said, it has its own bases, helicopters, air. Herceg Bosna has everything. Because, at the end of the day, this or that person doesn't say anything; the silence suits him. It is a fact that [that person] in Republika Srpska does not recognise the Bosnian language. But out of four cantons here, the Bosnian language is not recognised in three! And ours don't react. It isn't just that they don't react: someone said, "Send it to the Constitutional Court. Why don't you raise that problem with the Constitutional Court?" Recognition of languages. But first you have to admit other things. Admit that you committed a crime against Croats in Central Bosnia, in the Neretva Valley. I insist on that, and this is where they attack me. I said it in November and have repeated it many times: if Bakir [Izetbegović] apologised for Kazan, doesn't he have to apologise for Dobrovoljačka as well? Because that wasn't organised by the state or the army, it was organised by the mafia. Those Green Berets, the ones who brag about being saviours, what did they save us from? Who were they fighting against and what were they dealing with? And then [that person] wrote: "In the morning he is Uncle Jovo [Čika Jovo, referring to Divjak], in the afternoon he is Old Man Jova." And he also said that I should think about my own responsibility for Dobrovoljačka. So, because they benefit, they rule. It's good for him like this. He likes it this way.

What logic is there in the canton making it a condition for children to decide whether they want the Serbian, Croatian, or Bosnian language? "The more languages a man knows, he is that many more times a man." It's an old saying. But what kind of differences are there? *Kahva, kava, kafa*. ["Coffee" in Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian]. The differences are in the minds of those who depend on the authorities. They are dependent on getting some small amount of money from them.

Kušmić: In a similar way, in the sense of that mix of politics and religion, national and ethnic identity, is Europe working in that direction for the future?

Divjak: Well, this has been going on for a long time. This has been going on since the Second World War. It has been going on in Europe since the Second World War. Sometimes one of these things calms down, then it pops up again. You see how abruptly these changes of governments happened, that is to say dictatorships—the pressure from

the Russians. It was like that during and after Stalin. But all of a sudden, those who got some freedom of their own, the Czech Republic and Hungary most of all, Poland—they simply do not respect human rights. Imagine when [that person] said, “We don’t accept immigrants, migrants”—I don’t know exactly how he said it—“because that’s not our religion.” What does that show? That means that his religion does not respect other religions. If this is not respected in Europe, then how can we expect it to be respected here? So that Europe, that culture, that civilisation, of course—that came from Asia, not from here. They do not respect human rights. Because these are [not] “just some extremists misbehaving in Austria.” Le Pen is stronger than Macron and she got a few more votes for the Council of Europe.

Kušmić: Are you, then, in a way, when you look at the future of Europe, knowing much more about it than I and my generation.

Divjak: Well, I don't know more, but—

Kušmić: Taking into account your previous experience—World War II, Yugoslavia, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina—when you somehow put it all together, how do you see the future of Europe? Can you see it? Are you more pessimistic or optimistic? Do you see any hope?

Divjak: Neither. Neither optimistic nor pessimistic. I am trying to be objective. The situation is as it is. I was with your friend, your good friend, Spahić. Ibro [Ibrahim] Spahić. He now has that project “City.” I have a napkin on which he wrote that we would be in the European Union by 2011. I wrote that it won’t be before 2015. There is no Europe for us with this composition of government, because this government does not want Europe. It wants it only on paper. If we enter Europe, many of those in power will lose their heads. Because these authorities have been in power for the last twenty-five years. They are thieves, mobsters. Imagine, [Radončić] is going to be Minister of Security again. We know how many scandals there were. Well, I won’t go into something I don’t know about. So, no, I’m not going there at all. But I ask myself, “Where did he get the funds to build Radon Plaza, to build the Avaz Tower?” How is it possible for political leaders, for that man down there to divert the course of the Radobolja [river] in order to build his villa there, in Mostar? Not to mention Poljine—I saw it, I know where his property is. Where did they get the money for that? Where? This means they used illicit funds. Europe’s perspective, again, depends on America’s relationship with Europe. Before Trump, it was completely different. Trump expects to be re-elected. Because Trump wants to dominate. As does Putin, as does China. Today I saw a piece of information that surprised me: China has dropped off economically in recent years. That’s one side of the story. The other is that it has surpassed both America and Russia. So, there is a big confrontation. I’ll come back to the two of them—here they talk about peace, and there they wage wars.

One digression: Imagine, the French philosopher, Bernard Lévy, manages to convince his government and the English government that Libya should be attacked—and then to have this outcome. There were dictatorships in Iraq, Libya, Syria, but these were the states in which people lived well. They had weak mutual relations, but they were financially stable. Syria was among the most educated states. Its aspiration was to be at the centre of education. What is it today? A mess. And it will never again be what it used to be. Blair later apologised for being wrong in supporting America in attacking Iraq. He apologised. They made up that there were chemical [weapons] there. And so on and so forth.

We live in a social environment where we depend on two or three people and their intellectual abilities. That's what I'm talking about—intellectual abilities. How much is one able to understand what is more important, peace or war? Because all of them, all of them are winning, thanks to arms sales and the sale of medicines, i.e., pharmacy. We here brag about producing bullets. Talk about something nicer! They say that schools divide children. Not just schools, the programs. Three hundred metres from here they learn about the civil war. They learn that they have the right to defend their territory. What territory? What did [that person] have in Bosnia that belonged to Serbs? He doesn't talk about genocide. He doesn't want to hear about it. He even has the same history book as the Serbs. And he talks about NATO's aggression against Belgrade, against Serbia. No, not Europe. I think when Merkel steps down there will be even more problems. Imagine this absence of logic. Just have a look at this English ambassador. Now, he's been doing it a bit less lately, as well as his predecessor. They keep telling us about the European Union, how we should join the EU, but they are leaving it! And this [Lars-Gunnar] Wigemark. Cheeky person, interest-driven. We are back to the beginning. This is the demolition of democracy, letting these three make decisions about our lives, yours and mine. We have the Assembly, we have Parliament, we have state institutions. He ignores state institutions! They bark at each other and then, two years ago, when they met in East Sarajevo for lunch, when he had to sign for the IMF money—right? Izetbegović and Dodik.

Kušmić: And your generation, what can your generation leave to younger generations? You offer a specific example through Education Builds Bosnia and Herzegovina, but—

Divjak: Yes, there are less and less [of us]. And because there are less and less of us, what is more important for Bosnia—the movement, the anti-fascist movement—it's all fading away. All these structures are being torn down, are not mentioned anywhere. Indeed, the years of 1943, 1944 and 1941, 1945 are very important in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And it is being ignored now. I mean, among the authorities, it starts with them. It starts with them even today. Just the other day I was in Kladanj—or Kakanj, I should say. And I received the Peace Builder award from the city of Mostar. I say, "These

are the milestones we should talk about. It is 1943 that we should talk about, 1992.” So, this means fighting the tendency to destroy the idea of democracy, to preserve the secular state. This is where the money is. Can you imagine, at the event a month ago in Mostar, Novalić said, “I’m still going to be the Federation President.” Can you imagine? He knows he will still be. And they keep boasting about the work they have done, but during his time in office, only a few kilometres of highway have been built. Again, it’s always the same people. Terzić was in the government and he is now at the head of the company in charge of the roads in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And in the Federation. They cooperate very well among themselves but have no consideration for the common citizen.

He has some feelings for his fellow Bosnians. [Addressing Kušmić:] I don’t know how you became successful. Or rather I can see how, you did it yourself. But those receiving scholarships from us—and, you know, we have several of them who are with us from primary school to university, so for sixteen years—they have to choose a party [to join] in order to get a job.

Kušmić: Are you implying that, in a way, the younger generation will keep making mistakes similar to the mistakes made by the current generation?

Divjak: Our authorities are composed of two-thirds young people. They behave in the same way. They haven’t changed anything. Let’s look at any structure. I met these two guys in Kakanj, the mayor and the manager of the cultural centre, they seem to be very, very positive, since they have done a lot recently. The situation has been different in the past two years. Quite different. There are those who are trying to be independent. Not only there, it’s quite present in small towns, much more than in the city. You can see that municipal mayors are dominant here, in the Centar, Novi Grad, Novo Sarajevo, and Stari Grad municipalities. It’s a dictatorship. And, as they say, “What’s in it for me?” That is how they perceive their power. Bosnia, in its current form, will last. Europe won’t let it [be split apart]. There were some attempts, even before, to do something linking it to Kosovo. Europe prevented it thanks to Merkel and the French guy. Serbia won’t give it up, it wants its own part of Kosovo. Serbia is aware that it has lost Kosovo but wants to gather as great a Serb majority as possible. Europe has taken part in it so far but we don’t know what will happen tomorrow, as Russia supports Serbia’s position towards Kosovo. And you can see Dačić boasting . . . they brag about it. There you have it, they brag about it.

The [process of being admitted to the EU] is very slow simply because they are of different minds about Europe. Some say, “Well, there are still three peoples here, four dominant religions, and it’s difficult to harmonise.” Then they say, “What about Belgium?” It doesn’t work there either, they are constantly at war. They don’t want one another. You know, I was in Belgium four times, visiting our friend. In the north, near the sea, he has inscriptions in Flemish. He doesn’t even have them in English, his monuments, streets. Only [Flemish]. That part a bit of Germany, France. No way, no. Last year they didn’t have a

government for around a year. They are not shooting but there isn't, there isn't this—there is peace under olive trees but there is no understanding. And now Catalonia. We're fine, we have two or three projects. They ask me every time, "Do you support it?" You know, no matter what I said, they would say, "Look at him, he supports separation." And Dodik always says, "If Catalonia can do it, Republika Srpska can do it as well." What is the ratio now in the Council of Europe, is it 51 percent extremists? Am I right?

To go back [to your question]. It's not optimism, it's not pessimism. But it is our task to work on it, to try. Not to try, we have to—it has to be done. Particularly with regard to education. But there is no desire to change anything. Because this one here does not admit he committed crimes. Just as that one says, "I do not recognise genocide," this one here doesn't admit to having committed crimes.

Kušmić: People can understand a lot about you and your conduct by looking at your life, which I hope this interview will help accomplish. But in addition to all the messages you have shared with us during the interview, is there a message you would send to young people, not only in your organisation but to those of us who do not receive your scholarships? Like myself, for example. I was born in 1992. I am a young person, by certain standards, and there are those even younger than me in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Zenica, Teslić, Drvar, Ljubuški, etc., not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, perhaps across Europe. What message could you give to us who continue to build the world that you have devoted your whole life to building and that you continue to build?

Divjak: Try to make the family the foundation of your life. That's what Marx said, too, that the family is the basis. If you, young people have harmonious relations in the family, if you participate in making the family united in its diversity—the family must be united in diversity, so that each member can have their own opinion, attitude, position. Do not do to others things that you do not want done to you.

And another thing: for young people, of course. Mandela used to say that education was the strongest weapon we can use to change the world. New technologies in education enable young people to communicate, which means that family expands to encompass other people, which is very significant. They must communicate among themselves, to actively fight any form of fascism, nationalism, together. If it's purely in the family, it can't be extended to others. Young people must become engaged in politics. They must. But a politics that leads towards democracy, tolerance, peace—not extremes. So, to each and every one of you, young people, leaning towards extremists is not welcome. No, they can't be welcome. Certainly, young people can and should play a huge role with regard to Europe. There aren't many young people in the [European Union] or the Council of Europe. There are few young people there. They should oppose all extremists and all extremes. I mean, these are the steps that young people should learn [to take].

Certainly, there are many things that young people from all countries, from different continents, can and should do by means of the media. Let us remember—you should remember, you young people should read about the 1968 movement of young people in America who protested against the Vietnam war. Such things do not exist anymore. There must be more revolutionary spirit among young people in order to stop those who dominate politics. Many things can be done through culture, sports. I find it fantastic how FIFA and other associations are clear. You know that teams and athletes exhibiting fascist behaviour are punished. Punished. [The players] even get kicked off the team. So, there are many ways in which the current generation, meaning those between twenty and thirty years old, can—I don't say must—should, could contribute to raising awareness of the European community and try to give the member countries that make up its core the opportunity to exercise their fundamental human rights. From the right to life, to education, to language, religion, and so on.

Kušmić: Well, that's it for this interview, I think. It's been two hours.

Divjak: Two hours?!

Kušmić: Two hours and one minute.

Divjak: Dear God.